

A STUDY OF EVE'S ROLE IN "WEDDED LOVE" IN *PARADISE LOST*

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Milton embodies his clear sense of hierarchical relationship of man with woman in his poem *Paradise Lost*. The primary theme of the poem, as he clarifies in it, being to "justify the ways of God to men" (I, 26)¹, one might assume that for Milton the hierarchical relationship of man with woman is determined by the Divinity. As is observed in the poem, Adam calls Eve "Bone of my Bone, Flesh of my Flesh, my Self/Before me" (VIII, 495-6), "Part of my Soul" (IV, 487), "My other half" (IV, 488), or even "th' inferior" (VIII, 541), whereas Eve calls Adam "my Guide/ And Head" (IV, 442-3). Moreover, when the hierarchical relationship of them is broken, the Fall occurs, and when the relation is restored, Man's redemption is expected. Thus the hierarchy of "wedded love" is integrated into the dramatic structure of the poem, which corresponds with the Renaissance cosmic structure of Chain of Being.

But one might wonder if Milton really thinks of woman as inferior to man and subject to him, and then might recall what are told about Milton's treatment of his first wife Mary Powell and his crusade against the divorce laws of his country. The chief concerns of this paper, however, are to study how Eve is placed in the hierarchical structure of married love, how her position works in the thematic development of the poem, and to find out what is the real nature of the feminine role Eve plays.

I

Milton's scheme of hierarchy of "wedded love" is succinctly set forth in the poem through the Fiend's first observation of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. The Fiend sees that Adam and Eve are contrasted to each other in faculties.

though both
Not equal, as their sex not equal seem'd;
For contemplation hee and valour form'd;
For softness shee and sweet attractive Grace,
Hee for God only, shee for God in him: (IV, 296-300)

Adam and Eve are not equal. Adam is made for "contemplation" and "valour,"

Eve for "softness" and "sweet attractive Grace." Here it is to be noted that contemplation can be interpreted as reason, that is, superior element of the soul, whereas softness, as passion, the inferior. Evidently for this reason, Eve is not primarily and immediately the image of God, but only in reference to Adam. This relationship of them is further elaborated in imagery. Adam, describing to Raphael the details of his awakening after being created, tells him that he found himself lying on flowery herbs and in the direct sunlight.

As new wak't from soundest sleep
Soft on the flow'ry herb I found me laid
In Balmy Sweet, which with his Beams the Sun
Soon dri'd, . . . (VIII, 253-6)

Eve, on the other hand, giving her account of her first moments of consciousness and of her first meeting with Adam, says that she found herself resting on flowers, but under a shade.

That day I oft remember, when from sleep
I first awak't, and found myself repos'd
Under a shade on flow'rs, . . . (IV, 449-51)

Then, whereas Adam's first action is to raise his eyes to Heaven and to gaze on the sky: "Straight toward Heav'n my wond'ring Eyes I turn'd, / And gaz'd a while the ample Sky, . . ." (VIII, 257-8), Eve sees the sky of Heaven but in the mirror of the pool.

Not distant far from thence a murmuring sound
Of waters issu'd from a Cave and spread
Into a liquid Plain, then stood unmov'd
Pure as th' expanse of Heav'n; I thither went
With unexperienc't thought, and laid me down
On the green bank, to look into the clear
Smooth Lake, that to me seem'd another Sky. (IV, 453-9)

But Adam, then, jumps up, investigates the uses of his limbs, discovers his tongue, and employs it first in the act of reasoning; "But who I was, or where, or from what cause, / Knew not"; "how came I thus, how here? / Not of myself; by some great Maker then, / In goodness and in power preeminent;" (VIII, 270-9). He recognizes by his intellectual powers the cause of his existence, his relationship with God. Eve, in contrast, wondering where she has been brought from, receives no answer, but is deceived by the mirror image of herself, which is as unreal as the reflection of the sky.² As has been examined above, Eve is pictured as

“less excellent” (VIII, 566) in reason than Adam, whose mediation Eve has to seek to interpret God. There are still other pictures to symbolize their respective faculties. In the scene in which Adam receives lessons from Raphael not to trespass near the boundary out of curiosity about matters which are no concerns of Man, Eve retires at the beginning of the discussion to tend her flowers. Equally after the Fall, when Michael leads Adam to a lofty hill to show a visionary revelation of the future of the human race, Eve has a sleep to ask Adam later.

Thus, the hierarchy is so set that the being for “softness” and “sweet attractive Grace” should keep harmony with the being for “contemplation” and “valour,” until they become a perfect union like “One Flesh, One Heart, One Soul” (VIII, 499). Milton describes the ideal condition of “wedded love” by effectively employing the word “hand” in the scene in which Adam and Eve enter their nuptial bower before the Fall: “So hand in hand they pass’d, the loveliest pair” (VI, 321). Adam and Eve here are in perfect harmony with each other. Later when Eve proposes a new plan under which the efficiency of their work will be increased if they separate, she slips her hand out of his: “Thus saying from her husband’s hand her hand / Soft she withdrew” (IX, 385-6). Here the hand-in-hand relationship is broken, and some hours later Adam takes the fruit from Eve’s hand. Milton explains in the poem that the incident occurred on account of the triumph of “softness” over “contemplation”: “...he scrupl’d not to eat / Against his better knowledge, not deceiv’d / But fondly overcome with Female charm” (IX, 997-9). The immediate result of the incident is the degradation of their love: “Carnal desire inflaming, hee on Eve / Began to cast lascivious Eyes, she him / As wantonly repaid; in Lust they burn” (IX, 1013-5). Eve first recognizes much of the nature of Hell, and while Adam still blames her, she repents, imploring Adam for “His peace” (X, 913) with her tears flowing in a humble manner: “Between us two let there be peace, both joining, / As join’d in injuries” (X, 924-5). Adam, at the sight of a beauty’s submissive manner, recovers from anger, and starts upraising her with peaceful words. He, too, becomes penitent. Upon their expulsion from the paradise, Eve declares her renewed loyalty and obedience, saying to Adam, “now lead on” (XII, 614), in which Man’s redemption is foreshadowed. This is how the hierarchical relation between Adam and Eve is integrated into the dramatic structure of the poem.

II

It has been observed so far that the relationship between man and woman is a main theme of the poem, which is elaborated in the form of imagery and structure as well. Milton’s conception of hierarchy of “wedded love”, however, is not completely his original. He is influenced on this subject by among others St.

Paul, St. Augustine, and Plato, not to mention the Elizabethan cosmology and his own experiences in marriage. He relies, for example, on St. Paul, for his expression "He for God only, she for God in him" (IV, 299). About this he explains in "*Tetrachordon*":

But St. Paul ends the controversy, by explaining that the woman is not primarily and immediately the image of God, but in reference to the man: "The head of the woman," saith he, I Cor. xi., "is the man"; "he the image and glory of God, she the glory of the man": "he not for her, but she for him."⁴

This patriarchal concept was commonly held in ancient times, which Milton applies to his poem without hesitation. Another aspect of "wedded love", however, stems from the Renaissance world view of Chain of Being. His forthright exposition of it is seen in the poem when Raphael instructs Adam as follows:

O Adam, one Almighty is, from whom
All things proceed, and up to him return,
If not depriv'd from good, created all
Such to perfection, one first matter all,
Indu'd with various forms, various degrees
Of substance, and in things that live, of life;
But more refin'd, more spiritous, and pure,
As nearer to him plac't or nearer tending
Each in thir several active Spheres assign'd,
Till body up to spirit work, in bounds
Proportion'd to each kind. (V, 469-79)

It is that all things proceed from God and in love return again to God. If man loves truly in obedience to God, in time love will refine his substance so that he will turn to spirit like the angels. Such being the case, Adam endowed with superior reason should lead his family, and when Adam and Eve work in harmony, then their thoughts are so "refined" that they "may'st ascend to heavenly love." Milton puts it when Raphael again instructs Adam on the principle of "wedded love" as follows:

love refines

The thoughts, and heart enlarges, hath his seat
In Reason, and is judicious, is the scale
By which to heav'nly Love thou may'st ascend, (VIII, 589-92)

The principle of "wedded love" is in perfect accord with the Renaissance cosmic

view, which evidently corresponds with Milton's whole philosophy as well.

A research on the same subject into Milton's Divorce pamphlets discloses that he most eagerly sought in marriage for "conversation" rather than for mere hierarchy of love. In *The Doctrine and the Discipline of Divorce*, he explains on the purpose of marriage.

For although God in the first ordaining of marriage taught us to what end he did it, in words expressly implying the apt and cheerfull conversation of man with woman, to comfort and refresh him against the evill of solitary life....⁵

By conversation he means society, or harmony in intellect. This is why Eve was created "By conversation with his like to help" (VIII, 419). Certainly Milton's assertion is that marriage must be based on harmony in reason between man and woman, and that in case such harmony does not exist, the marriage is null, and so divorce should be pronounced. In the same pamphlet he defines marriage as "a human society," adding that "all human society must proceed from the mind rather than the body."⁶

Now to have a look into Milton's personal experiences in marriage, he got married in 1642 to Mary Powell, who deserted him a month later. Quite a few biographers write that her desertion of him is his immediate cause of his writing his Divorce pamphlets. Milton, however, says very little about her desertion as a ground for divorce. He very probably found in Mary "natural sloth which is really unfit for conversation."⁷ Milton on occasions does admit that woman may have more intelligence (One may recall for example his friendship with Lady Ranelagh), in which case, wisdom, not the mere fact of maleness should govern the family decision. He writes in *Tetrachordon*:

Not but that particular exceptions may have place, if she exceed her husband in prudence and dexterity, and he contentedly yield: for then a superior and more natural law comes in, that the wiser should govern the less wise, whether male or female.⁸

In the poem, too, is found what he desires woman to be, in phrases such as: "of fellowship I speak / Such as I seek, fit to participate / All rational delight" (VIII, 389-92).

As has been observed so far, what Milton primarily demands on woman in "wedded love" is fit intellect. Another marked feature which is demanded on woman, is mutuality, in other words woman's positive participation in man's occupations. The reason Adam asks the Almighty for a companion is that although man is created "perfect" and in him "Is no deficiency found" (VIII, 415-6),

Adam feels a lack that requires a complementary half to fulfill. He needs Eve to "solace his defects" (VIII, 419). Milton conveys this feature of love by calling it in words such as: "mutual help / And mutual love" (IV, 727), "love and mutual honour" (VIII, 55), and "Collateral love" (VIII, 426). He further illustrates this reciprocal relation between Adam and Eve in imagery, equating them respectively with the sun and the moon, "the two great sexes that animate the world."

What if that light
Sent from her through the wide transpicious air,
To the terrestrial Moon be as a Star
Enlight'ning her by Day, as she by Night
This Earth? reciprocal, if Land be there,
Fields and Inhabitants: Her spots thou seest
As Clouds, and Clouds may rain, and Rain produce
Fruits in her soft'n'd Soil, for some to eat
Allotted there; and other Suns perhaps
With thir attendant Moons thou wilt descry
Communicating Male and Female Light,
Which two great Sexes animate the World,
Stor'd in each Orb perhaps with some that live. (VIII, 140-52)

III

Further observation on the subject significantly reveals that "subjection" or "submission" does not imply degradation. Rather, Eve seems to enjoy it as a privilege. Milton in his description of Eve exalts feminine submission, for example, in the scene in which Eve enters the nuptial bower with Adam.

Shee as a veil down to the slender waist
Her unadorned golden tresses wore
Dishevell'd, but in wanton ringlets wav'd
As the Vine curls her tendrils, which impli'd
Subjection, but requir'd with gentle sway,
And by her yielded, by him best receiv'd,
Yielded with coy submission, modest pride,
And sweet reluctant amorous delay. (IV, 304-11)

Eve thinks of herself as "enjoying / So far the happier Lot" (IV, 445-6) since she has Adam for her companion, while Adam "Like consort canst nowhere find" (IV, 447-8). In the scene in which Raphael explains celestial Motions to Adam, it is in a manner "Majestic" and with "Grace" that Eve retires from her seat to "her Fruits and Flow'rs." (VIII, 42-3)

Eve, however, enjoys not only submission but freedom of choice in her own way. Cunningly enough Milton provides her with an independent relation to the divine, despite her apparent subjection to Adam for the interpretation of God's will as well as for her own duty. She discloses that while she was retired, she "over-heard" (IX, 276) Raphael's warning to Adam not to trespass near the boundary out of curiosity: "both by thee inform'd I learn, / And from the parting Angel over-heard / As in a shady nook I stood behind" (IX, 275-8). After the Fall, too, when Michael shows Adam a visionary revelation of the future of the human race, Eve sleeps but actually in her dreams God appears and gives her advice: "God is also in sleeps and dreams advise" (XII, 611).

The incident of the Fall and the expectation of Man's redemption that follows it depend to a large extent on Eve's exercise of "Female charm" in her capacity to choose freely and consciously. It is Eve who first tries the forbidden fruit and then proposes it to Adam. It is again Eve who first repents of her fault and then seeks peace with him. On the other hand, Adam on the first occasion gets "fondly overcome with Female charm," and on the second, again, he is moved by Eve and loses all his anger "As one disarm'd" to see "at his feet submissive in distress, / Creature so fair his reconciliation seeking" (X, 942-5).

In spite of her capacity to choose, fortunately Eve is treated tolerantly by the divine. When Adam protests that imbalance has taken place in their creation by which her beauty has been too powerful on his intellect, Raphael sternly replies: "Accuse not Nature, she hath done her part; / Do thou but thine" (VIII, 561-2). The scene in which Eve wonders why night is such a glorious sight when all beings are sleeping is symbolic of the divine grace on her: "But wherefore all night long shine these, for whom / This glorious sight, when sleep hath shut all eyes?" (IV, 650-60). Here Eve corresponds with Night, which ostensibly reveals Milton's conception of the relationship between man and woman, that God created both man and woman equally great just as the Almighty explains in Book VII referring to lights: "And God made two great Lights, . . . the greater to have rule by Day, / The less by Night altern" (VII, 345-6).⁹

As has been examined above, Eve has freedom of choice which implies the freedom to choose wrongly as well as rightly. In initiating the sin of tasting the forbidden fruit, Eve makes a wrong choice; in repenting of it, a right one. Though the sin is "occasion'd" by her thus, as she admits it herself, it turns out that they do not know whether they should repent of it or rejoice the overwhelming good that evil will eventually bring forth. Eve exclaims as follows:

O goodness infinite, goodness immense!
That all this good of evil shall produce,
And evil turn to good; more wonderful

Than that which by creation first brought forth
 Light out of darkness! full of doubt I stand,
 Whether I should repent me now of sin
 By mee done and occasion'd, or rejoice
 Much more, that much more good thereof shall spring. (XII, 469-76)

Obviously, Milton stresses so powerfully God's scheme of "refinement" or "growth" (For God sure esteems the growth)¹⁰ that he makes Eve's weakness in reason the ground and occasion for the redemption of Man. In his *Areopagitica*, Milton declares: "I cannot praise a fugitive and cloistered vertue, unexercised and unbreathed." Then he adds that what he thinks "purifies us is trial," and that "trial is by what is contrary."¹¹ Eve's intellectual weakness at least works as a trial to Adam.

To conclude, Eve in *Paradise Lost* is characterized as comparatively sensual and intuitive in contrast to Adam, who is characterized as comparatively intellectual and discursive. Though she is assigned to be subject to him in their hierarchical "wedded love" which "hath his seat in Reason," her subjection is a privilege to her, which makes her feel more fortunate than Adam is. Significantly, Eve is provided with freedom of choice so as to act in accordance either with her natural drive or with her intuitive or else referential perception of the divine will. What is demanded on her thematically in the poem is to take the latter choice, in which case, as Milton admits in *Tetrachordon*, woman may guide man although she has to do in such "prudence" and "dexterity" that man will be contented. Graciously for Eve, even if she is driven by her natural force, she still works as a trial to Adam, serving as one of "two great Lights" to help him with God's scheme of "refinement" of the soul. Milton explores in the poem a dynamic influence woman has over man even in a patriarchal society. Living in an unsettled age of the seventeenth century, confronted with social and intellectual conflicts which threatened at times to dismember the culture of the country, he presumably expected from woman her positive concern with intellectual affairs, while wishing her to act within the framework of domestic peace.

NOTES

¹ All references to the poem discussed are to *Paradise Lost*, ed. Merritt Y. Hughes (New York: Odyssey Press, 1935). Notes to quotations from this edition are given parenthetically in the text. Footnotes are given only to quotations from other references.

² There are some critics who link Eve's fascination with her own image with narcissism which may lead to the Fall. They think it is an indication of her natural depravity or the fact that she has already fallen, but I hold the same view as Joseph Summers in that Eve's behavior at this stage is a natural and inevitable potentiality for any free creature. See Joseph Summers, *The Muse's Method* (London, 1912), p. 97. I do not think it is good to distort Milton's details into mythical meaning. Milton in quite a few cases is free from applying conventional meanings. The nightingale, for example, is always an "amorous bird of Night," the singer of fulfilled love in *Paradise Lost*, although it is conventionally employed as the bird of frustrated love.

³ As to Adam in this situation, C. S. Lewis argues that Adam fell by uxoriousness, he resolved to treat a lower value as an absolute. I agree with him in his following observation: "...if there are things that have an even higher claim on a man, if the universe is imagined to be such that, when the pinch comes, a man ought to reject wife and mother and his own life also, then the case is altered,..." See C. S. Lewis, *A Preface to Paradise Lost* (London, 1967), pp. 126-7.

⁴ John Milton, "Tetrachordon," *The Prose Works* (London, 1907), Vol. III, 342.

⁵ Sirluck ed., *Complete Prose Works of John Milton* (New Heaven, 1959), Vol. II, 235. Hereafter cited as *Complete Prose Works*.

⁶ Milton, "The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce," *The Prose Works*, Vol. III, 210.

⁷ *Complete Prose Works*, Vol. II, 250.

⁸ "Tetrachordon," *The Prose Work*, Vol. III, 342.

⁹ Milton in this idea is in accordance with St. Augustine, who believes that God created all things good without exception, and because they are good, what we call bad things are good things perverted. See C. S. Lewis, *A Preface to Paradise Lost*, p. 66. However, there are studies made by critics on the subject of Eve's nature. For example, William Empson equates Eve with Satan by examining Milton's use of the pagan myths, and finding the explicit link between Eve and the Titans. See William Empson, *Some Versions of Pastoral* (London, 1935), pp. 175-6. Jonathan H. Collett, on the other hand, locates Eve somewhere between Eden and Hell. He affirms the difference between Satan and Eve as clearly as the similarity between them when he examines Milton's use of the word "feigned" used for the description of Paradise and the word "fabled" used for that of Hell. See Jonathan H. Colett, "Milton's Use of Classical Mythology in *Paradise Lost*," *PMLA* (Jan. 1970), Vol. 85, p. 92.

¹⁰ Milton, *Areopagitica* (New York, 1951), p. 26.

¹¹ *ibid.*, p. 17. Eve criticizes the naive idea that the mere temptation leaves a stain of dishonor on the soul, and she says to Adam in the very language of *Areopagitica*: "And what is Faith, Love, Virtue unassay'd / Alone, without exterior help sustain'd?" (IX, 335-6).

¹² *The Prose Works*, Vol. III, p. 325.

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